

**Warning**  
**Acts 21:1-16**

They can't be avoided. They are everywhere to the point of being ad-nauseum. It borders on the ridiculous. Here are some real product warnings:

On a bottle of shampoo for dogs – “Caution: the contents of this bottle should not be fed to fish.”

On a curling iron – “Warning: this product can burn eyes.”

On a hair dryer – “Do not use in the shower.”  
“Do not use while sleeping.”

On a case of a chocolate CD in a gift basket – “Do not place this product into any electronic equipment.” The title cut – “You Melt Me.”

On a pair of shin guards made for bicyclists: “shin pads cannot protect any part of the body they do not cover.”

On an electric rotary tool: “This product not intended for use as a dental tool.”

On an “Aim-n-Flame” fireplace lighter: “Do not use near fire, flame, or sparks.”

On a frisbee: “Warning: May contain small parts.”

On a birthday card for a 1 year old: “Not suitable for children aged 36 months or less.”

In the manual for a microwave oven: “Do not use for drying pets.”

On a can of air freshener: “For use by trained personnel only.”

On a motorcycle helmet-mounted rear-view mirror: “Remember, objects in the mirror are actually behind you.”

On a package of silly putty: “Do not use as ear plugs.”

On a portable stroller: “Caution: Remove infant before folding for storage.”

On the package for an iron: “Do not iron clothes on body.” They might get a little steamed.

On a child sized Superman costume: “Wearing of this garment does not enable you to fly.”

On a container seal: “Do not eat if seal is missing.”

On a package of peanuts: “Warning, may contain nuts.”

On an emergency safety procedure for a camp: “In case of flood, proceed uphill. In case of flash flood, proceed uphill quickly.”

We have warning signs of all kinds. There are warnings to watch for merging traffic or a lane shift or multiple curves with reduced speed or road construction. We see warnings to watch for hidden driveways or farm vehicles or animal crossings. They tell us about steep roads or missing bridges. There is even a sign in Pennsylvania warning drivers to watch out for tanks.

The medical profession has warning signs for health conditions.

The food and drug requires warnings on labels from food allergies to expiration dates.

A warning is preparing someone about a pending danger, to encourage them to be on their guard, to exercise caution or to keep them safe and protect.

For those of us old enough to remember the adventures of the Robinson family lost in space, predictably in about every episode the robot would exclaim “danger, Will Robinson, danger.”

Our passage today is about a warning. Turn in your Bibles to **Acts 21:1-16**.

## I. THE SERVANT OF GOD SETS HIS SIGHTS ON COMPLETING HIS TASK – v. 1-3

Paul has concluded his third missionary journey and is headed to Jerusalem. In his letter to the Romans he indicated his hope that after this trip to Jerusalem his desire was to travel to Spain with a stopover to visit them in Rome. In a meeting with the leaders of the churches in Ephesus we read in **20:22** that he was **“compelled by the Spirit”** to go to Jerusalem.

There were four reasons for his travels to Jerusalem. One reason was to be there in time to celebrate Pentecost.

Another reason was to meet with and encourage the Jerusalem church.

A third reason was to distribute the offerings collected from the Gentile churches in relief of the famine they were experiencing. It was this provision that Paul hoped would further galvanize both Jewish and Gentile believers into one body, one church.

A final reason was to obey the will of God who was leading Paul by the Holy Spirit to Jerusalem. It wasn't just his destination, it was his destiny. He did not know what was going to happen there, but he had been directed by the Holy Spirit to go there and had been given a warning by the same Spirit that danger awaited him, danger that included hardship and prison. Onward Paul went in willful obedience.

Now we can read these first few verses and glance over them with little notice to something important that is happening here.

We notice in verse one there is a parting of the travelers from the Ephesian leaders. The KJV uses the word parted or gotten away, suggesting that it was a very pleasant departure. Man, we had a great

time, let's do it again. The NIV provides a more accurate understanding of the word indicating how difficult the departure really was. The word means to drag away. It was tough for them to say goodbye to one another because they had a strong affection.

I remember moving to St. Louis many ago early in ministry. I had gone up to Camp to see Mom and Dad and say goodbye to them. Dad prayed, we all hugged and I got in the car to head down the road. It was less than a mile from their house to the main road and by the time I reached the Camp gate I was bawling my eyes out because I wasn't sure when I was going to see them again. It was tough leaving.

That's the scene here, but remember this is God's will. Paul was compelled by the Spirit to go. They got on board ship at Miletus and sailed to Cos. There the crew unloaded the cargo and loaded more cargo. They spent the night and the next day sailed from Cos to Rhodes. They unloaded the cargo and loaded more cargo. They spent the night and the next day sailed from Rhodes to Patara. They had about a 400 mile journey to make and Paul was eager to get to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. He could see this was going to take a long time. Paul couldn't afford to have these delays. Rather than hugging the coastline around to Judea he found a ship that was going across the Mediterranean Sea sailing past Cyprus and landing at Tyre for a spell of seven days before going on to Judea.

Think of it this way. Let's say you wanted to take a trip to Charleston, West Virginia. It's just under 400 miles. So, you pack up your stuff, fill the tank and away you go. You stop in Brighton because your wife needs some new shoes. So you go shopping and decide to spend the night. The next day you head down the road and get as far as Ann Arbor and you just have to see the big art fair, so you spend yet another night. The next day you make it to Dundee and just can't pass up a stopover to Cabella's and there you spend the night. The next day you travel to Toledo and stop because

you've heard great things about the zoo. At that rate a trip that would normally take about 6 ½ hours is going to take a long time. You decide then and there to catch a flight out of Toledo that will take you directly to Charleston with a layover in Columbus.

Paul knew his destination and he knew his destiny. It was his desire to fulfill the will of the Lord. He didn't know what waited for him there but he knew he didn't want to have any more delays than necessary to get there.

God has a will, a plan for each of you. Would you all agree with me on that? Maybe you already know what that will be. Maybe you already know where God is leading you, but you'd rather take the scenic route to get there. You're taking your time, hugging the coastline. Oh, you'll get there all right, but it will be on your schedule not necessarily when God wants you to arrive. Paul didn't want to delay.

**Will you today surrender your time schedule and your will for His will?** Maybe you're taking an indirect route with stop overs along the way. I don't know what it is He may want you to do or where He may want you to go, but you're dragging your feet a little. As I sometimes tell David when he's taking a little longer to do something like head upstairs to go to bed, "Let's get moving. Stop dilly dallying." He wants to put off going to bed as long as possible. Maybe today the Lord would be speaking to you about putting off long enough what He has been wanting you to do. A servant of God sets His sights on completing the task given to him. Only you know what God is asking or has been asking you to do. **The question is will you do it now? Will you put off the delays and take the more direct path that will help you accomplish what His will is for you?**

In the next section we notice something else the servant of God does.

## II. THE SERVANT OF GOD SEEKS FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS – v. 4-9

The wording of this opening section implies that it took some effort to find this group of believers. Most scholars believe that this group of believers had settled in Tyre after the persecution that began with the stoning of Stephen at the hands of none other than Saul. Tyre was an old city dating back before the days of Israel. You may recall that it was Hiram of Tyre who assisted King David in securing timber that would be used for the construction of the Temple. Tyre was a fairly large city but had just a small group of believers.

It took a week for the ship Paul and company were traveling on to offload their cargo and take on new cargo so it gave Paul the opportunity to get better acquainted with this group and to encourage them in the faith. Imagine this first meeting though. Some of these believers may have left Jerusalem because of the man now standing before them. Once mortal enemies because of his desire to scourge the earth of all Christians, Saul or Paul now embraced the very Christ He sought to eradicate. Now brought together under the banner of the cross they shared a brotherhood that was bound up in the gospel. Paul, like them, was saved by the same grace. What a reception that must have been meeting now under different circumstances. One thing is for certain, there was an overwhelming sense of God's grace and forgiveness in that place.

Paul made an effort to seek out those who were believers, not necessarily to confess any sins he may have committed against them during those days of persecution, but rather to commune with them in the presence of God to encourage faith. It took effort for him to find them and they worshipped together for that week. And notice that at the end of this meeting they knelt on the beach and prayed. There were men, women and children, young and old, rich and poor all bound in the

promise of God that they were knit together as one body in Christ and they prayed.

I hope that when you travel away from home, in all the planning that you do to prepare for that journey what you'll pack, where you'll stay, where you will eat, what you will do that you will take time to plan for where you will worship. It can be a daunting task to try and find a church in a new place, but take the time to investigate and make the time to go. Even if you are staying with friends or family who may not attend church, show them how important your faith in Christ is by going. It is the writer of Hebrews who charges us with not forsaking our getting together with other believers to encourage one another. Don't neglect getting together.

Paul made the effort to find them. He could have come up with all kinds of excuses to stay. It had been a long journey, I'm tired, I need a break. I'll spend the time in my own worship service or just watch a service on TV. They won't want to see me. After all, I probably forced some of these believers out of Jerusalem because of my earlier persecution. But he didn't. He sought them out and joined them. I hope you will too.

After prayer they left for their homes while Paul and company boarded the ship for the next leg of their journey. In two days' time Paul would find himself on Judean soil, his journey near completion. Arriving in the Roman capital of Caesarea in Judea, they were greeted by believers there and ended up in the home of Philip the evangelist. You will remember him from Acts 6 as one of the seven guys chosen by the Jerusalem church to help serve the widows. He had a good reputation and was filled with wisdom and with the Spirit. He was also the guy who found himself trotting alongside a chariot on that desert road who was invited by the Ethiopian Eunuch to share the meaning of Isaiah 53. Eventually he settled down in Caesarea, got married and had 4 daughters with the gift of prophecy.

Imagine Paul's meeting with Philip for the first time. It may have been just like the meeting with believers in Tyre. Paul's early ranting against Christians was well known. I'm wondering if Philip had a few memories come up about those early days of the church under Saul's attacks.

Imagine with me a very similar scene. Corrie ten Boom had been traveling to various churches sharing her testimony of God's grace during her life in the concentration camps. Let me read this account from her own words.

"It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there – the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blانched face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. 'How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein.' he said. 'To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!'

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through me a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me...It took a lot of love."

We each know people who have in some way been wronged by someone else, perhaps even someone from church – those who profess to believe. Consequently they have chosen not to return to church. They may or may not still believe in God. **What are we doing to encourage them to return either to their faith or to assemble with other believers? What are we doing to encourage them to get past the hurt and forgive?** Maybe you are one who has been wronged in the past and you know the hurt and betrayal. Maybe it took you a long time to get over that feeling of believing the need to remain distant and removed from church because of it. Maybe now is the time to open up and let the healing begin, to let the forgiveness of God flow through you so that together with others you can worship God.

The servant of God seeks to fellowship with other believers.

The servant of God surrenders his will to the will of God.

### III. THE SERVANT OF GOD SURRENDERS HIS WILL TO THE WILL OF GOD – v. 10-16

There are some scholars who believe that Paul was not in God's will in going down to Jerusalem. They cite these prophetic warnings as God's directing Paul in a different direction. Yet we will recall from the previous chapter, v. 22, that it was the Holy Spirit that compelled him to go. Since his conversion there had been no other time in Paul's life where he stubbornly resisted the Spirit's leading. He was always sensitive to do exactly what the Lord wanted. You will recall on his second missionary journey in chapter 16 that Paul had a desire to go into Asia minor toward Ephesus but the Lord redirected him. He then wanted to go up into Bithynia but the Spirit wouldn't allow him. He was directed to go into Europe instead. He was never so stubborn as to go against the will of God in order to do his own will.

I have a niece who went to college for linguistics. She majored in Chinese and Spanish and minored in Japanese and maybe one other language. When she graduated and was asked what she was going to do with her education, she shocked everyone by saying she really wanted to go into veterinary work and be an assistant. When asked why the change and how long she had been thinking about it she indicated that it been for a couple years but was too stubborn to change so she finished even though she knew it wasn't what she wanted to do.

Paul never did that. This is God's will. Even now knowing that as he journeyed closer and closer to Jerusalem hardship and prison waited for him, he pressed onward. **"I am ready not only to bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."** That's quite a bold statement isn't it? You will recall that Peter made a similar statement when the Lord informed the disciples of what would happen to Him and that they would all betray Him. "Not me" Peter said emphatically. **How about you? Have you made such a bold claim?**

Paul said it and meant it. His life was about completing the task God had given him even if it meant prison, even if it meant death. He would tell the **Philippians (1:21) "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."**

If this was written in Paul's day it would have been his song: (*I'll Live For Him*, #590)

My life, my love I give to Thee,  
Thou Lamb of God who died for me;  
O may I ever faithful be,  
My Savior and my God!  
I'll live for Him who died for me,  
How happy then my life shall be!  
I'll live for Him who died for me,  
My Savior and my God!  
O Thou who died on Calvary,  
To save my soul and make me free;  
I'll consecrate my life to Thee,  
My Savior and my God!

Paul understood what his objective was. When he wrote to the Ephesians to remind them that they had been saved by grace he had these important words to say to them: **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (2:10)**

The Greek word for workmanship has the connotation of being a work of art. Think of yourself as God’s masterpiece and God has a sovereign plan or purpose for your life. God’s masterpiece of Paul, His purpose for Paul was stated clearly to Ananias at Saul’s conversion. **“This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (Acts 9:15-16)**

It was clear to Paul what he had to do and he would not rest until that work for Christ had been accomplished even if it meant jail or death.

**Philippians 3:7-10 “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death...”**

**I Timothy 4:7 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not**

**only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.”**

Sheila Walsh, songwriter and speaker with Women of Faith has said “Sometimes the greatest act of worship is to put our own plans to death to embrace God’s plans.”

**Whose will, whose plans are you following – yours or God’s?**

After a long day of teaching the multitudes Jesus instructed his disciples to feed the masses that were there. They all shrugged their shoulders and wondered where on earth could they get that kind of food in such a short time. Even if there were fast food restaurants in that day, they didn’t have enough money to buy what would have been required to feed them all. If you have a \$1 fry, drink and burger, just to feed the 5,000 men would have cost \$15,000. Andrew had a plan but it wasn’t a very good one. Lord, there’s this snotty nosed little kid who has a snack bag. It’s got a few fish and some barley, but that’s only enough to feed one person. Bring him here.

That little boy gave all he had to Christ. At the end of his life Paul could look back and state that he had given all he had for Christ, he had followed God’s will, not his. He never deviated from God’s plan. I can’t say that? Can you. There was a period of about 9 years or so that I wasn’t doing what I knew I should be doing for Christ. The prayer I am offering to God is **Joel 2:25** that He will restore the years I allowed the locusts to eat.

Paul could have very well been content to stay in Tarsus after his conversion and just study and teach there. But you will remember that one day there was a knock on his door and on the other side of the threshold was his old friend Barnabas. Maybe his hair was a little grayer and a little thinner but it was his friend. He needed some help with leading the church in Antioch and would Paul help out. That set in motion the events that would lead Paul to this

point in his walk with Christ, a walk that was ever and always about Christ and doing his will. He abandoned his own will in order to follow after the will of God.

Friends pleaded with him not to go, warning him of the dangers that awaited him as the Holy Spirit also revealed to them, but Paul would not be persuaded against what He knew to be in fulfillment of God's will for him.

**How about you? How easy is it for you to deviate from what God might be wanting for your life?**

Maybe you know what God wants you to do, but others have persuaded you to go a different route.

Paul could endure untold hardships and then even death because he knew he was in the center of God's will, he was where God wanted him to be even though it meant temporary pain and suffering. Paul could move forward in confidence because he was trusting in the Lord who will provide him with the strength and grace to endure all God was asking of him, and to do it with confidence.

It is true what Paul wrote in **Philippians 4:13, 19** **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me...And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory."** Surrendering your will is about trusting God to provide.

He had set his heart on God and God had given him the desire of his heart (**Psalm 37:4**)

Listen to these passages and ask yourself if this is where you are today – trusting in the one who has a plan for you.

**Proverbs 3:5-6** **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths."**

**Psalm 91:1-2** **"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress my God, in whom I trust.'"**

**Psalm 121:1-8** **"I lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip – He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you – the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm – He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore."**

**Jeremiah 29:11** **"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord.'"**

**Jeremiah 33:3** **"Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."**

Paul had learned to trust the person of God and could therefore trust the plans of God. He made a conscious decision to obey God no matter what it cost him. To him whatever sacrifice he made was worth it for Christ. He could trust God to give him strength. He could call on him and God would be there. Those who attempted to persuade him from continuing on came to the conclusion that it was God's will.

**Is that the kind of trust you have in God? Are you willing to abandon your will to God today?**